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Collective Shout and The Puritan Censorship Trojan Horse

hyenablood Following 10 min read · Jul 28, 2025

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The internet has rightfully been up in arms about censorship groups meddling with adult content and the clown du jour currently is the "feminist"* advocacy group Collective Shout. Earlier this month, Collective Shout began pressuring payment processors like Visa, Mastercard, Stripe, etc. to revoke processing from Steam and indie platform Itch.io unless they complied with the removal of games deemed violent and unethical, which has resulted in a vast swath of NSFW (and in some cases, non-erotic and SFW games) being delisted or even outright removed. In response to this, there is a change.org petition currently sitting at nearly 170,000 signatures as of me typing this and a counter campaign to call payment processors pressuring for a reversal on their capitulation to Collective Shout with resources being shared on Bluesky and sites like yellat.money. With this primer out of the way, this article is less about the specifics of the petitions and games removed from Steam and Itch, which has already been reported on (including a now archived VICE article by Ana Valens that VICE owner Savage Ventures had removed, prompting multiple writers to quit in protest), and more about *how* situations like this are reported on.

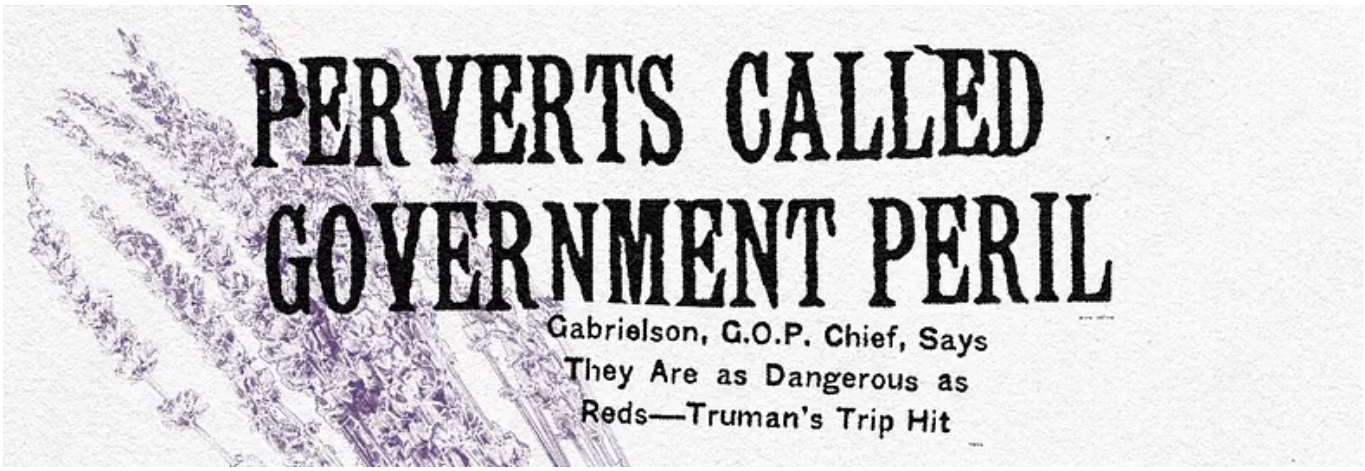
TL;DR if you're running late for an appointment you should've left for 10 minutes ago, I believe **journalistic integrity demands coverage of topics such as this includes discussing the appropriation and misuse of advocacy language to distract from ulterior motives as well as what those motives are,** but you should come back and finish reading when you're done with your appointment.

content warning: nondescript discussion of violence, sexual abuse, and rape as themes in media.

Shortly after their initial open letter, Collective Shout did a victory post where they claimed misogynistic "gamers defend their rape games", and that

gamers were sending threats and CSAM (Child Sexual Abuse Material) to the Collective Shout team which obviously is inexcusable and horrific. The gaming community is rife with heinously vile men that feel entitled to women being objectified and presented how they please for their gaze (do I even need to bring up the meltdowns people had over Naoe in AC Shadows, or complaints that Aloy looked too masculine in Horizon?), and it is right to call out the behavior of people like this. While I would love to see every gamer that acts this way ejected into the sun to sizzle out of existence in a fraction of a fraction of a second, it's essential to push back on the notion that *this is the only kind of person that would object* to Collective Shout's campaigns, implied or otherwise.

Historically, acceptability censorship and obscenity laws have always disproportionately affected the queer community, not least of all because the religious people that participate in such campaigns see queer existence as something intrinsically perverse and profane. The immediate current examples that come mind include HB 1557, HB 1069, and then of course we have YouTube's erasure, safe mode filtering, and demonetization of queer content, as well as their removal of "gender identity" as a protected classification from hate speech. If you want to have an extremely bad time, just google "Lavender Scare" or "Entartete Kunst", read up on the Hays Code, or dig around in *The First Amendment and the Roots of LGBT Rights Law: Censorship in the Early Homophile Era, 1958–1962*.



An example of queer censorship specific to Itch's response to Collective Shout pressuring payment processors comes in the form of people now speculating on how the current ToS and potential future changes to it will affect to the furry visual novel community as Itch.io was the primary platform for hosting furry visual novels. With Itch's ToS addition of prohibiting games with bestiality or "animal-related" content (a wildly loose term that could easily be used to blanket ban queer furry content), many see parallels to Fansly banning content with fursuits when an update to their ToS classified fursuits as "simulated bestiality". Whether or not you like furries or fursuits, this is laughably ridiculous.

None of this is particularly novel, we've seen similar situations with KOSA, SESTA, FOSTA, etc.; acts with surface level agreeable goals on the packaging like preventing human trafficking that are most charitably seen as poorly written and designed by people with little understanding of the internet whose implementation actually results in sex workers being more endangered. The stated goal may have been to prevent sexual exploitation, but sanitizing the internet put sex workers further in danger by cutting off resources they previously had like more easily being able to vet clients, leading to more exposure to violence. The inefficacy of these bills leads to a reversal of Hanlon's Razor; were they only poorly conceived, or was sanitization the goal more than preventing victims?

The crux of the issue with journalistic integrity in regards to reporting on all of this is twofold. **1; this notion of "agreeable packaging" in obscenity advocacy campaigns and how it is reported on in relation to those opposed to it**, and **2; the necessity to disclose ulterior motives.** Collective Shout's primary stated goal in this campaign is to fight the facilitation of content that has violent and sexual abuse especially in regards to women and children and make no mistake, these are in fact severe and detestable topics. The debate on the appropriateness of such topics to be shown in challenging media, critical, glorifying, or otherwise is not the point of my writing here.

The point is how the "reasonableness" of objections to such serious topics are an easy foot in the door for broader obscenity censorship and how objection to these campaigns demands mindful and *comprehensive* coverage. The average layperson sees the declaration that Collective Shout wants to combat content that shows rape and violence against women and children and agrees with that, and why wouldn't they? **These are objectively bad things.** They perhaps do not see the bigger picture that censorship dragnets like this often catch and silence queer content for the above discussed reasons such as the religious compulsion to denigrate queer media (and people) as unacceptably obscene. When queer artists and creators push back against censorship, coverage of that pushback that is not comprehensive in mentioning these finer details (such as the recent Guardian article) practically does the work of manufacturing consent for queerphobic zealots and the layperson to associate the queer community with the surface level packaging of campaigns such as Collective Shout's. The primary opposition to Collective Shout of course isn't that the majority of people are demanding to play games glorifying rape, but rather that Collective Shout's use of advocacy language provides an opening for far broader conservative censorship that disproportionately impacts the queer community under the cover of more reasonable objections. This isn't just speculative, it's already

happening. My source? I compose music and do graphic design for a lot of visual novels and every project I work on is currently delisted. Itch is doing an audit of all the delisted games and maybe by the time you read this they'll be back but the people behind censorship campaigns are hard to satisfy. (Edit August 7 2025: Itch has since relisted games so long as they disable the option for donation and payments on their page.)

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We've already watched the tactic of Reasonable Packaging play out in plenty of other spaces beyond media censorship. The (non)issue of transgender athletes—which the informed know is not an issue at all — was presented as a reasonable concern to the layperson and used as a wedge to pry open further dishonest discourse about trans people until we found ourselves embroiled in such fevered caustic debate on the very existence of trans people that affirming trans youth is seen as tantamount to mutilation and cisgender women are attacked for not appearing conventionally feminine enough. One might worry that having to discuss queer censorship in the same breath as objections to abusive and offensive media so often reifies the aspersions conservatives cast upon the queer community but the reality is that it shows how much work has been laid to dishonestly portray queerness as inherently sexual and profane. **Responsible reporting on topics such as Collective Shout's campaign necessitates confronting this work and dismantling it by making clear to the layperson that isn't Queer, Informed, And Terminally Online, the broader consequences, the reasons those broader consequences happen, real motivations between each side, and the networks perpetrators of censorship belong to.**

Yes, I made a halftone collage image with Amicus Adastra in Photoshop for this very serious article ok, be normal about it this is what real journalism looks like.

Some of Collective Shout's objections to obscene media ring hollow and capricious at best considering director Melinda Tankard Reist offered praise for the controversial film Cuties in both her own Religion & Ethics column and for a Christian newspaper, which most charitably has been described as a cautionary tale about sexualizing children meant to engender compassion for victims, an exception they apparently don't want to extend to other media. Beyond Collective Shout, Reist was a founding director for Women's Forum Australia, a conservative think tank with such lofty accomplishments as harassing staff members of the retailer Big W until the store pulled a sex education book, being unabashedly transphobic gender critical trolls, and claiming to be feminist while being anti-abortion. You would think empowering young women to recognize and name abuse through sex ed, supporting abortion, and not being conservative would be strong contenders

for ideals held by self-professed feminists but I guess Collective Shout and its affiliates would disagree (*hence feminist being in quotes at the start of this).

NCOSE is part of Collective Shout's campaign and wouldn't you know, they're big fans of the EARN IT act. This far into this article, it shouldn't surprise you to hear that while the EARN IT act presents itself as combating CSAM, it also adversely affects the queer community because of the perception that queerness is inherently sexual. So many instances of bills introduced to try to curb abuse and exploitation are embarrassingly clumsy fumbles that hit the queer community with splash damage (intentionally or not) because they're just haphazard shotgun blasts used in a context that calls for methodic surgical precision. It should go without saying that the network of players involved with this type of legislation or support for it should *always* be under scrutiny for their ties to conservative motivations because it is an established modus operandi for conservatives to try to hitch adverse effects to queer people to obscenity censorship presented as reasonable.

The faith-based group Exodus Cry is also a cosigner on Collective Shout's open letter and their involvement — considering the things founder Benjamin Nolot has said and the events he has spoken at — casts Collective Shout as **a manipulative dime-a-dozen hate campaign mill disguised in the trappings of feminist activism to assist in the sanitization of adult and queer presence from the internet.** From the hyperlink above:

> *According to OpenDemocracy, Nolot defined "sexual immorality" as "all sexual activity outside of the marriage covenant between one man and one woman" and said that 'toxic sexuality' was to blame for abortion, teen pregnancy, and the "implosion of the nuclear family" along with rape and sex trafficking.*

> *Nolot has also spoken at events organised by the Catholic anti-LGBT hate group C-Fam and the Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry (BSSM), whose co-founders wrote a book on "sexual purity" and called homosexuality "the ultimate identity crisis."*

I could go on dissecting the insidious web of people either working at Collective Shout, cosigning their open letter, or connected to them but by now you should get the idea. Obscenity censorship does not coalesce in a vacuum and I think it is journalistic malpractice to report on it as if a campaign's superficial goals are the finish line. People should be fully informed on how these groups attempt to manipulate them with reasonable complaints while either neglecting to mention the scope of their own intentions or the beliefs and motivations of groups they associate with. I doubt Itch.io's compliance with Collective Shout was a deliberate slight against the queer community, and while Reist is on the record in The Guardian's article saying blanket removal was not the objective of their campaign, I'm not so credulous to accept that at face value from an anti-abortion TERF organizing with groups whose founders speak at events organized by queerphobic hate groups. We should know better than to think this network of ghouls is just coincidence.

Beyond the necessity of the layperson being shown how they are manipulated by these advocacy groups, the queer community is also owed comprehensive dissection of these topics so that their opposition to censorship they know historically starts as "reasonable" then expands in scope to erasure isn't used as ammunition to inculcate accusations of them being abusive deviants or inherently sexual. In our current political climate, or perhaps any, it is not prudent to give censorship campaigns the benefit of the doubt. The furtive weaponization of people's good intentions and desire to prevent harm in order to punish, sanitize, and remove the marginalized

and “degenerate” comes from a playbook that is so old it makes failure to recognize it frankly embarrassing. By now we should recognize it for what it is, scrutinize it, and report on it in a way that doesn’t enable its proponents to mischaracterize dissent as obscene deviancy.

Finally, never take for granted the fact that the people loudest about protecting kids from harm are often people that are fine with harming children themselves. They scorn fictional violence and abuse while perpetuating it in real life. How many conservatives have you seen busted with CSAM or for directly harming a minor? Remember when #NotADragQueen was a thing on Twitter? This isn’t a tu quoque defense because the statistics of conservatives that harm minors vs. queer people are staggeringly disproportionate which in turn is explained by the fact that these people live and die by the need to exert power and control, weaponize authority, and destroy autonomy wherever possible. The benefit of the doubt in this context is squandered on abusers that seek to erode sex education and bodily autonomy.

Addendum: As I talk about how I think coverage of issues like this should be handled, I want to highlight pieces that do it justice. In addition to Valen’s VICE article linked at the start of this, the recent PCGamer article by Harvey Randall is excellent.

https://www.techdirt.com/2025/08/05/mastercard-claims-nsfw-game-bans-arent-from-them-valve-explains-how-mastercard-launders-its-control/

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